

Madagascar Red Owl *Tyto soumagnei* in Ankarana Special Reserve, Madagascar

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L'Effraie de Soumagne *Tyto soumagnei* dans la Réserve Spéciale d'Ankarana, Madagascar. Cette note documente la première observation de l'Effraie de Soumagne *Tyto soumagnei* dans la Réserve Spéciale d'Ankarana, au nord de Madagascar, en octobre 1999. Cet oiseau, qui a été photographié à son dortoir, est connu pour passer la journée dans une galerie latérale d'une caverne assez profonde, un site certainement inattendu pour cette espèce forestière. De plus, *Tyto soumagnei* est normalement associée à la forêt ombrophile sempervirente, alors que la végétation forestière à Ankarana est dominée par la forêt décidue sèche. Des lambeaux de forêt semi-sempervirente existent cependant dans quelques canyons ombragés.

Ankarana Special Reserve lies c.60 km south of Montagne d'Ambre National Park in northern Madagascar, but is less well known than the latter area. It covers 18,225 ha and has an extensive karstic cave system (ZICOMA 2001), which I visited with colleagues on 11 October 1999. The main vegetation consists of dry deciduous forest, evergreen rainforest in the canyons, and palm woodland. While approaching a site known as 'Perte des trois rivières' ('where three rivers disappear,' Fig. 1), our local guide Sabri informed us of a Madagascar Red Owl *Tyto soumagnei* roosting by day in a deep cave, now completely dry. He climbed down the almost vertical wall of the cave—an open circular hole c.100 m in diameter and 50 m deep—and disappeared into a narrow lateral gallery at the bottom. He reappeared quickly, nodding affirmatively that the owl was present. He then flushed it from its hiding place and the bird perched for c.2 minutes on the lower part of the opposite wall. Eleon Rabemananjara managed to take four pictures with my small camera, some at less than 1 m (Fig. 2). Because of the flash, the owl appears less uniformly deep red than it was in the field.

The presence of *Tyto soumagnei* at Ankarana was mentioned recently for the first time (Cardiff & Befourouack 2003, Thorstrom & René de Roland 2003), but full details have not been published and I am unaware of reports prior to October 1999. This poorly known species is considered Endangered (BirdLife International 2004): it is normally associated with rainforest and it is certainly unusual to find the species in an area where deciduous forest is dominant, with dense

semi-evergreen forest confined to sheltered canyons (Cardiff & Befourouack 2003). In addition, the bird was found roosting in a situation more typical of Barn Owl *T. alba*. Indeed, this is the first such record of a Madagascar Red Owl roosting in a cave.

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Figure 1. 'Perte des trois rivières,' Ankarana Special Reserve/Réserve Spéciale d'Ankarana, 11 October 1999 (Jacques van Esbroeck)



Figure 2. Madagascar Red Owl *Tyto soumagnei*, Ankarana Special Reserve, 11 October 1999 (Jacques van Esbroeck)
 Effraie de Soumagne *Tyto soumagnei*, Réserve Spéciale d'Ankarana, 11 octobre 1999 (Jacques van Esbroeck)